

## Self-Aware by MegAMusicLover

**Category:** Stranger Things, 2016

**Genre:** Hurt-Comfort

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Jonathan B., Nancy W., Steve H.

**Pairings:** Jonathan B./Nancy W.

**Status:** Completed

**Published:** 2017-10-29 10:16:08

**Updated:** 2017-10-29 10:16:08

**Packaged:** 2019-12-17 04:36:47

**Rating:** T

**Chapters:** 1

**Words:** 3,497

**Publisher:** [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)

**Summary:** CONTAINS SPOILERS (very slight) from SEASON 2 EPISODE 2! Rated for language! Nancy is struggling with Barb's death and her own continuing life and acts out because of it. Jonathan doesn't think he understands her, but while he helps her get home he realizes he can know how she feels, if he just puts himself into her shoes.

## Self-Aware

Disclaimer: I do not own any of the characters, nor even this first part of text!

**SPOILER ALERT:** This story starts with a transcription of a **scene in season 2 episode 2** so if you haven't seen that yet make sure you watch it before reading!

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"You wanted—you wanted this."

"No I didn't want this, I told you to stop drinking"

"Bullshit."

"It's not bullshit."

"Bullshit."

"It's not bullshit Nancy."

"No you—you're bullshit."

"What?"

"Y-you're pretending like—like everything's okay. Y'know like, like, like we didn't—like we didn't kill Barb. Like—like it's great. Like we're in love and, uh, we're partying. Yeah let's party, huh, party, we're partying. Tha's—it's bullshit."

"'Like' we're in love?"

"It's bullshit."

"You don't love me?"

"It's bullshit."

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After a moment's pause, with Steve's stupid, bullshit mouth hanging

open, he finally shut it and brushed past Nancy, the movement putting her off-balance and causing her to lean against the bathroom counter for support.

*Good.*

She didn't think about it. In fact she wasn't thinking about much. That had become her goal. If Steve was going to drag her out to a stupid party, then she was going to drink herself stupid. She couldn't stop seeing Barb everywhere, even when she closed her eyes. It was driving her crazy. And looking at Steve was just reminding her of why she left Barb alone that night. That it was Steve's and her fault. But not even really Steve—just her. All her fault.

If she had been a better friend, Barb would still be here.

She wiped one more time at her shirt with the washcloth before attempting to smooth her hair, but taking both of her hands off of the counter resulted in her hips falling towards it while her face met the mirror in front of her. She could feel her face leave some oil on the glass, her wet shirt putting red punch on it. She couldn't push herself back up, although she couldn't find it within her to care. Maybe she should just lay down on the floor and go to bed.

It's not like anyone cared anyway. Or like she deserved anyone to care.

She sniffled, but she wouldn't cry here. Looking in the mirror, she noticed a red plastic cup out of the corner of her eye. The goal to drink, to forget, to medicate resurged and gave strength to her limbs.

She put her hands on the mirror and pressed as hard as she could muster, leaving prints on the reflective surface. Looking at herself in the mirror, she didn't recognize the person she saw staring back at her—short hair, blurry-eyed, messy shirt, unkempt party-hair, red in the face...

Barb's cheeks used to get red so easily.

Nancy gave a final shove off of the mirror, pushing away from herself, her feelings, her thoughts, and her reflection, and, in a final

defiant move, she snagged the red cup as she swung the door open and staggered out of it. She chugged what was in it and made her way to the door to go back to the dancefloor, leaning on the wall as she went.

The red on her shirt could just be fake blood—it was Halloween, after all. Maybe tonight no one would be able to notice the real blood on her hands, not even her.

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Jonathan looked on as the party progressed, a worrying feeling in the back of his mind. Ten minutes ago Steve and Nancy had gone into the bathroom, and neither had come out yet. Nancy was extremely drunk. He wasn't sure he liked this new party-version of Nancy, judging by what he'd seen go down between her and Steve as he tried, in vain, to get her to stop drinking.

He didn't understand her, sometimes.

Like right now, he didn't understand why she had decided to get so drunk, and in a long-term sort of way, why she was dating Steve Harrington.

Steve had been horrible to him his entire life. And Jonathan could remember a time when Steve was horrible to Nancy, too, before Nancy went through puberty in 10th grade.

But he was nicer now, to Nancy at least, he reminded himself. Nancy was happy. That was what mattered.

He noticed that as he spoke with Sam, the girl dressed up as a member of Kiss, he had subconsciously angled himself towards the hall containing the bathroom that they had gone into, and furrowed his brow. Why was it that, even though she didn't wait for him and jumped straight into dating Steve, he continued to wait for her?

*What is wrong with you? It's pathetic. She basically doesn't even want you around.*

His attention was again pulled away from Sam—he should really just excuse himself, he wasn't being much of a conversational partner,

anyway, and she was so nice—when the door to aforementioned bathroom opened and shut with a loud *slam*.

Steve Harrington walked down the hall pinching his nose and looking... upset? Jonathan couldn't put his finger on the emotions covering his face, but as Steve walked past about a foot and a half away he thought he saw his gaze flicker towards himself and then away, almost faster than Jonathan could blink. His eyes were glassy.

Steve marched out the front door and slammed that one behind him, too.

Jonathan excused himself from Sam, telling her it was nice to meet her and that he'd see her around. He couldn't just keep smiling and nodding emptily. It was rude.

Steeling himself, knowing he should just leave this well-enough alone but feeling compelled as though pulled by the strongest magnet in the world to go check on one of the only girls who had ever been human to him and who he had so many different feelings for he could scream, he walked down the hall and raised a hand to knock on the bathroom door.

As his hand was poised, the door opened, and a shape staggered out towards him.

It collided with him, he having outstretched both of his hands in confusion and to ward off the approaching threat, and he felt sticky liquid touch his palms as his hands came into contact with thin shoulders.

"Wh—Get off of me!" He heard Nancy's voice exclaim somewhat loudly—and belligerently—before the shape tried to move past him down the hall.

"Whoa, whoa, Nancy, it's me, Jonathan. What's going on?" Jonathan squeezed her shoulders, holding her in place while he tried to get a good look at her face.

"He's—just, bullshit. It's all—it's all bullshit." He had never heard Nancy's voice sound so defeated.

He didn't have time to process this as she again tried—with some success, this time—to push past him back to the dancefloor. But as he turned to follow her she turned towards the kitchen, and he noticed a red cup in her hand.

"Hey, wait—Nancy! Should you be drinking any more?"

As he hurried after her a group of people moved between them and he got held up. Over someone's shoulder he saw that she was in the kitchen dipping her cup in the punch already. And downing it. And filling it again.

Somewhat in a panic, Jonathan shoved past the partiers and got to Nancy, taking her glass from her. She tried to put up a fight, but time seemed to have slowed down for just her and as she moved her hand to grab her cup back from him, he had dumped the contents into the sink and maneuvered to put his other arm under hers to support her already—her hand met with the air where his jaw would have been.

Frankly, he was glad he hadn't been standing there—he knew from experience that Nancy had a good arm, and he was sure that being intoxicated wouldn't have that much of an effect.

"Nancy, come on, let's get you home."

Nancy seemed to open her mouth to respond, even lifting one hand and her pointer finger on that hand as if she was about to tell him all the reasons he was being ridiculous and that he should unhand her immediately, but then her hand abruptly fell down and her head lolled over, her neck becoming entirely unsupportive. She mumbled something to him that he couldn't hear as he half-led, half-carried her through the dancefloor, out the door, and to his car.

As he opened his passenger side door some guests gave him funny looks, but seeing that the girl was passed out and he completely sober, they shrugged and kept moving.

*How are people still arriving? It's like eleven o'clock. Halloween is ridiculous.*

Shaking his head and suddenly feeling aged, Jonathan buckled Nancy

in and gently leaned her head against the head rest of the driver's seat, closing the door as softly as possible behind her so he wouldn't wake her up—although he wasn't entirely sure that was possible at this point.

He went around to the driver's side and got in, making sure to turn down the volume knob on the radio before starting the car. He cringed at the engine's cacophony as it started, glancing over to see a completely zonked Nancy. Her mouth hung open just the tiniest bit, and a small snore escaped her.

Jonathan tore his gaze from her and, checking for drunken party-goers in every direction, pulled into the street to start the drive home.

On the ride he contemplated the situation he was in at the moment, probably a little too much for his own health and the sake of his admittedly rocky friendship with Nancy Wheeler.

They were friends at least—that was more than he could have said about a year ago.

What had happened last winter had changed them, and everyone else touched by the Demogorgon, either figuratively or literally.

Even Steve.

Especially Barbara and Will.

Thinking of Barbara, he glanced to Nancy and tried to imagine what it would have been like if Will had never come home.

He suddenly understood why Nancy had gotten so drunk, he decided.

Perhaps it was natural for people to self-medicate, he thought, when they were struggling with something so awful. He could think of other people who did the same—Chief Hopper with booze and drugs, he himself with music, hell, even his mom with her cigarettes and alcohol when she was told Will's body had been found. Sometimes, pain could be too much to handle in the moment. One had to push it away however they knew how and deal with it later.

Nancy had been pushing it away for almost a year.

Her self-medication solely consisted of ignoring it, going out every now and then, but even when she tried not to it seemed like no one around her would help her deal with it. They wanted to ignore it too. He supposed he was part of that problem. They never talked about what had happened.

It was hard for him, especially when she was with Steve.

She hadn't waited for him. He had just gotten his brother back, and she hadn't waited. He was traumatized too. Didn't that matter to her?

He was getting upset, squeezing the steering wheel, worrying his top lip with his teeth.

Why hadn't she waited? He was almost ready. He knew she had thought about waiting. But then she'd just gone to Steve. Like there were two options and he was the simpler one. It wasn't even that he was the better one. He saw her glance to him in the hall when they passed each other, Steve's arm around her while he talked big to his posse following them around. Nancy's eyes were sorrowful.

So why didn't she leave him and be with Jonathan?

Jonathan just had so many questions, and she wouldn't offer him any answers, so when she tried to talk to him after class or gave him her sad eyes, all he could do for frustration was ignore her, blow her off, look away.

This was her fault.

He huffed and rolled his eyes at himself. He didn't usually get mad. He was very controlled about his feelings. His family situation and how the kids treated him at school had taught him long ago that feelings usually weren't helpful, so he just didn't get upset about things in the first place. There was no point in bottling it up and exploding and it didn't matter what he did with his bullies or his dad (really, weren't they one in the same?)—it always ended the same, with him made to feel bad, regardless of if he fought back.

He pushed stuff away, too, he supposed.



He looked at Nancy again, head lolled to the side against the window, eyelids twitching as her dreams took hold, mouth slightly open with small snores escaping it every now and then.

Sleep was a good escape for her, probably.

Was that was Steve was? Was he just another way to push away things she found hard to deal with? Self-medication of a kind he had never had access to—people who changed you into something you weren't, so you wouldn't ever have to face what you were?

A distraction.

Jonathan never could have been that for her. Because when it came to her, he did have feelings. He hid them, tamped them down, because it was more convenient to be emotionless than to be upset that she didn't seem to return them anymore, or that she had dropped him like it meant nothing.

But she had been going through losing Barb, when Will had come home. His brother came home and she was glad for him and Jonathan and their mother, but her friend distinctively *didn't return*, that same night. And he knew she blamed herself. Steve too—but she was the reason Barb was dead, as far as she was concerned. So when she didn't come back but Will did... it would make sense that she would need someone, and maybe even need someone who wasn't Jonathan, because Jonathan's brother was back and Barb was dead.

So she couldn't wait, and she couldn't wait for him. Maybe that was why she was dating Steve Harrington.

Jonathan pulled up into the Wheeler's driveway and turned off the car, sighing heavily and closing his eyes as he rubbed them.

He turned and looked at Nancy.

Her brow was still clenched, her dreams seeming to have turned in a bad direction.

He brushed some of her hair behind her ear and heard her mutter something, the crease in her forehead smoothing out. He quirked a small, almost nonexistent smile.

He got out of the car and went around to the passenger side, opening the door and putting a hand on Nancy's shoulder. He shook her shoulder gently, hopeful maybe she would wake up a bit so he wouldn't have to entirely carry her inside.

No such luck. He decided to lift her arm and put it around his shoulders, bracing her up with his own arm around her shoulders. He began to lift her up, holding her propped against his side. She seemed to gain a vague sense of consciousness, her feet moving a bit, one in front of the other, ploddingly as they tottered up the path to her house.

*Thank God Mrs. Wheeler leaves the front door unlocked*, he thought as he approached the stairs to her front stoop. At least he wouldn't have to pick a lock or try and get Nancy to tell him where the extra key was—or even try and carry her up through her window. Though she wasn't heavy, he wasn't that strong, and he couldn't imagine how he'd have begun that effort.

As they neared the stairs suddenly her weight became much heavier, her legs stopping their slow but steady movement as her boot caught on an uneven part in the path. She began falling forward and Jonathan nearly fell with her, but he managed to keep them upright, stopping her body just in time before her face might have met the ground. He could feel the punch still not dry on her shirt soaking through his jacket. She was shivering in the cold as the damp soaked into her bones.

They managed to hobble up the stairs to the door, which he opened as quietly as he could, before making their way painstakingly up the stairs and into her room. As he opened the door he nearly sighed in relief. He finally had her home and could get her into bed, and be done with the night. This had been entirely too much feeling for him this evening.

*Pretty terrifying Halloween*, he thought wryly, amused and frustrated all at once.

He laid her down on the bed, taking off her boots one at a time and placing them on the floor near her. He thought about trying to get her shirt off, to prevent the punch from soaking in to her bed, but

thought better of it—she might be upset with him or feel uncomfortable in the morning. He regretted making her feel uncomfortable with his photography last year, and resolved not to risk doing that ever again. She would just have to bleach the sheets if they absorbed any of the drink.

He started trying to cover her up, making sure she wouldn't catch cold in the night with wet clothes and a lowered internal temperature because of her alcohol consumption. As he did so she fidgeted, her sock-feet toes twitching and her nose wrinkling cutely. It warmed his heart a little, but he ignored it. This was like being on a rollercoaster, and he was ready to get off and safely be back on the ground.

Nancy's eyes were flickering and opening to slits as she observed her surroundings drunkenly and half-asleep.

Suddenly, in what seemed to be moment of clarity and alertness, her eyes opened wide like she was fully awake and focusing on Jonathan, her brow pinched together yet again that night.

"Jonathan," she said simply, just his name and her expression holding more meaning than he think he had ever conveyed in any utterance in his life. Her hand grasped his forearm, as firmly as it could in her inebriated state.

Her expression was bittersweet, loving, grateful, upset, and tired all at once. Not tired like physically exhausted, although she was that, too, but tired in an existential sort of way. Her eyes were infinity pools of sadness and despair, but the crinkle around them and the slight uptilt of her lips said thank you for driving her home, for helping her up the stairs, they would laugh about this tomorrow, and stay the night, please, because being alone with herself was a terrifying prospect that she wasn't sure she could face right now.

After just a second he was convinced that he might agree to her demands.

The moment lasted less than five seconds before her eyes closed, hand fell from his sleeve, and her head dropped to her pillow.

*Typical Nancy—there for all of the buildup, and MIA once you reach to*

*the point.*

He finished tucking her in and walk to her door, turning to look at her one last time and pursing his lips.

He would always be there to help her and take care of her when she needed it, as a friend or in whatever capacity she wanted him. They had shared too much together for that not to be the case, and he cared too much about her to let her slip into self-medicated complacency like Hopper had. She would have to face herself sometime, and soon, if she wanted to feel better. He would tell her that, maybe.

He gazed at her for another moment and turned off the light before closing the door.

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A/N: So this scene kind of just made me wonder what Jonathan would be thinking as he was taking her home, so I wrote about it!

Thanks for reading and I hope you enjoyed! If you like this please feel free to look at my other stories or leave a review!

-MegAMusicLover